**Virtual Residency Faculty Development Document Review**

**Citation:**

Siemens, G. *Learning and Knowing in Networks: Changing Roles for Educators and Designers.* Paper presented to the ITFORUM for Discussion, January 27, 2008.

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**Overview of Paper:**

This paper presents the author’s ideas relative to the changing role of educators and instructional designers in the emerging area that he calls “networked learning”. He suggests that due to issues such as global competition, the increasingly complex life/work issues that today’s students will face/are facing, and a growing need for innovation, that education needs to revamp its very foundations. A key element includes reassessing the role of faculty in the 21st century classroom. The notion of “other ways of being” for a faculty member is based on Siemens’ notion that the world is “increasingly defined by networked structure” (p. 4). He suggests that more research is being conducted on functionality and flow in networked learning than on roles of educators and offers a discussion on how the roles of both educator and instructional designer might be reconceptualized to align with the evolution of the traditional classroom. Then notion of networked learning alters many traditional concepts of both learning and teaching including the following: the hierarchical structure of the classroom relative to power/authority/trust, the expectations of digital natives in the classroom, expansion of the definition of who an “expert” is, evolving communication styles (e.g., instructor to student versus more participative environments), methods/approaches used for content creation, use of technologies that encourage participation (e.g., blogs, wikis, virtual worlds), including social networks that have evolved and now support learning activities.

Traditional learning theory and methods must evolve, as “the calls for educational reform appeal to systemic change-from hierarchical control to flexible and adaptive networked models” (p. 8). Siemens suggests that a fourth epistemological framework that focuses on “knowledge as composed of connections and networked entities” (p. 10) be added to current frameworks (e.g., objectivism, pragmatism, and interpretivism) that inform the most common theories of learning (behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism). He suggests that a new theory of learning, which he calls *connectivism*, is evolving because today “knowledge is distributed across networks and the act of learning is largely one of forming a diverse network of connections and recognizing attendant patterns” (p. 10). While the paper includes some limited criticism of this new notion/theory, Siemens concludes that new theories/models of learning that align with the realities of today – including online learning - are definitely needed.

The remainder of the paper focuses on instructional approaches that align with connectivism and networked learning environments. Concepts include different types of classrooms (physical and virtual), uses of control/power within the classroom, relationships between students/faculty, degrees of instructor presence/facilitation in learning (e.g., direct guidance versus guided instruction), uses of various communication technologies and a better understanding of how learning occurs in a networked learning environment. Siemens suggests that

“The blending of formal and informal, structured and unstructured, expert and amateur, is a vital task for educators-not simply to perpetuate existing models of education or to pursue activist agendas, but to prepare learners for active engagement in a world not defined by structured cause-effect relationships, but by one that emerges through ‘manifold interactions among constitutive elements’ Mason (2008, p. 49)” (p. 14).

The article concludes with a discussion of the role of faculty in a networked learning environment, and includes the following metaphorical examples: master artist (Seely Brown, 2006), network administrator (Fisher, n.d.), concierge (Bonk, 2007), and curator (Siemens). A master artist works with a group of students who learn from each other as well as an educator who guides and offers perspective, but does not necessarily direct the efforts. A network administrator helps students develop personal learning networks by discovering the connections necessary to do so either on their own or with guidance from the educator. The concierge ensures that students know what is available to them in terms of resources and provides different levels of guidance relative to accessibility and opportunities for self-exploration. Educators as curators, according to Siemens, have two roles: “as experts with advanced knowledge of a domain and guides who foster and encourage learner exploration. Educators create learning resources that expose learners to the critical ideas, concepts, and papers within a field” (p. 17). He goes on to explain that the role of instructional designers has also evolved to meet the needs of a networked learning environment and now includes being “an educator to educators” (p. 18) by performing many of the same roles that educators now need to play in the classroom with students.

References

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